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ABSTRACT

According to this paper, a good reading teacher is able to analyze problems faced by students in reading and remediate that which is necessary. The paper stresses that the reading teacher needs to be a good observer of student reading habits to notice where to intervene to improve the skills and attitudes of the reader. It discusses diagnosis and remediation in word identification, diagnosis and remediation in comprehension, and the development of good attitudes toward reading. (Contains 10 references.) (NKA)

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Analyzing Student Difficulties in Reading.

by Marlow Ediger

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ANALYZING STUDENT DIFFICULTIES IN READING

A Good reading teacher is able to analyze problems faced by students in reading and remediate that which is necessary. These are generally complex situations involved in reading instruction. Quality teachers

1. are highly knowledge about methods and procedures of reading instruction.
2. take much interest in the welfare of learners in the school setting.
3. show they care for each student to become a proficient reader.
4. emphasize a child centered philosophy of teaching.
5. begin with where each student is presently in reading achievement and then work for optimal growth for each (Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter One).

Diagnosis and Remediation in Word Identification

The reading teacher needs to be a good observer of student reading habits to notice where to intervene in order to improve skills and attitudes of the reader. Each student is unique in reading achievement and yet there are selected common errors made by learners in reading. First, the learner may not make adequate use of context clues. All students should be taught to use this skill in determining the correct word in contextual situations. Meaning theory is involved here. Thus if a student does not know a word in context, he/she should use the other words in the sentience to ascertain the unknown.
Sometimes, more than one sentence may be read to identify the correct word. If students provide outlandish guesses to replace the unknown word, the reading teacher needs to help the reader to provide a word which does make sense. Students tend to be aware of words that are not meaningful within a sentence. Sometimes, this is not adequate for a student to identify the correct word since several words provided may each be meaningful and yet not be the correct one.

Second, useful phonic elements need to be taught. An unknown word might begin with a familiar consonant letter. The consonant letter may then provide the key to the reader as to what the correct word is which fits into the rest of the sentence contextually. There are advocates of a strong phonics program of sequential sound/symbol relationships be taught. Intensive phonics for young readers will then be in the offing. The scope and sequence of the reading program may then consist of phonics instruction largely with some time being given also to reading comprehension. The author takes the point of view that phonics should be taught as needed in context. Generally then, phonics would not be taught as isolated entities, but as needed to students within an ongoing reading lesson. Vital grapheme/phoneme relationships need to be in the repertoire of students. Diagnosis and remediation need to occur to assist students to become independent in word recognition techniques (Ediger, 1999, 15-18).

Third, if a student does not recognize a word while reading, he/she may be aided by noticing a prefix or suffix in the ongoing reading lesson. For example, the word "unusual' is not being identified by a learner, he/she might then be assisted by removing the "un" prefix. The student may have experienced the word "usual" and identified it correctly previously. The prefix "un," is very common in certain words. With the learner putting together two knowns, he/she is ready to proceed in reading meaningfully. The student should not spend an excessive amount of time in struggling to identify any unknown word. After

attempting to identify a word for approximately five seconds, the student should be given help by using a diagnosis and remediation approach in order to become an independent, confident reader.

Fourth, students may lack background information needed to read the ongoing subject matter meaningfully. A major task of the reading teacher is to provide and discuss the necessary facts, concepts, and generalizations prior to reading a given selection. A variety of concrete, semi concrete, and abstract experiences presented in an understandable way might well guide students in acquiring background information to attach meaning to what is being read. The background information relates directly to the ongoing reading lesson. It behooves the reading teacher to observe discussion settings to notice if students can relate the previously acquired knowledge with the new subject matter being assimilated.

Fifth, oral reading should be done with expression using voice inflection. The first of three ingredients of voice inflection is stress. Here, the reader pronounces a word louder than the others within a sentence. A monotone voice says all words orally on the same level of stress. With voice inflection, the reader interprets content read and pronounce words on different levels of stress depending upon the interpreted meaning when orally reading a given selection. Linguists generally recognize four levels of stress from softness to loudness in oral language. A second ingredient of voice inflection is pitch. Pitch emphasizes words being said aloud pitched higher or lower, just as notes in a musical score are placed higher and lower on a staff. To interpret content spoken aloud, the reader needs to pitch selected words higher and others lower. A third ingredient of voice inflection is juncture. Here, the reader needs to pay careful attention to commas, periods, question marks, exclamation points, and quotation marks. It makes much difference in the meaning of a sentence if careful attention is not being paid to punctuation marks. For example, if a student omits all commas in reading the following sentence: At the picnic they had ham sandwiches jello salad and milk; how many food items were served at the picnic? It is difficult to say. It depends upon where the commas are placed to be read orally as pauses. There could be as many as five and as few as three food items at the picnic. It is important to interpret carefully in terms of what is being read aloud as well as silently. Diagnosis and remediation is salient in the use of voice inflection by students. Otherwise misinterpretations may readily come about .

Diagnosis and Remediation in Comprehension

Students should acquire not only vital facts from reading, but also move upward to more complex levels of thought. There is nothing at all wrong with reading and remembering factual information. After all, in moving upward on the scale of higher levels of thinking, facts provide the involved foundational learnings. Facts to be acquired should follow selected criteria including the following:

1. they are important in helping students to understand the ongoing selection.
2. they are vital and salient.
3. they aid learners to understand what will be stressed in higher levels of cognition.
4. they are useful now as well as in the future.
5. they cut across the curriculum and integrate well into many academic disciplines.

A second kind of information read has to do with understanding inherent subject matter being read. Reading for understanding aids in retention of subject matter. Thus, meaning theory is very important to stress in a quality reading program. With meaning attached to what has been read, the learner can answer questions pertaining to content read in his/her very own words. This is different from answering questions covering subject matter read using textbook language or attempts to do so. Students should have maple opportunities to reflect upon what has ben comprehended so that understanding and meaning might be emphasized within a group/collaborative setting.

With reflecting upon understandings acquired in a meaningful way,the student is perhaps entering into a higher realm of cognition such as using ideas in a utilitarian way, the third level of cognition. There should be ample opportunities in the reading curriculum for learners to use in new ways that which has been learned. With use made, the student is better able to retain ideas gleaned through reading. They like to perceive that content read can be used in practical as well as novel ways. Relevancy in the reading curriculum is an important concept to emphasize in ongoing lessons and units of study;.critical thinking. The reading teacher needs to observe if each student is making application of previously learned subject matter in reading. This does need to be evaluated since a good reading curriculum emphasizes using quality assessment techniques to notice learner achievement and progress as well as to plan sequential lessons of instruction.

Fourth, the teacher must be an advocate of implement teaching strategies to aid students to analyze content read. To analyze means to divide what has been read into component parts. These component parts should include separating the factual from opinions, the fanciful from realness, and the useful from the non-useful, such as in seeking possible answers to questions. The detection of bias as well as jumping on the bandwagon are further areas for analyzing subject matter read. The reading teacher then has vital responsibilities to notice if students are inquiring into what has been read and not merely accepting content as being factual and possessing absolute truth. Being gullible and naive certainly can be costly to any human being in school and in society (Ediger, 1976, 7).

Fifth, the reading teacher needs to guide students to engage in creative thinking involving that which has been read. To engage in creative thought, the reader needs to develop original, unique ideas based on content acquired. Novel ideas are definitely wanted in creative thinking. In supervising student teachers in ht public schools, the author has noticed that selected teachers have been highly successful with brain storming procedures. There generally are salient questions to ask learners over subject matter read. The question may involve many possibilities as answers. A plethora of possible answers from students may then be explored and printed on the chalkboard or typed with the use of an overhead projector. Each response must be treated respectfully with all students being encouraged to engage actively in generating ideas within the brain storming activity. Reading teachers need to asses if all are participating in a creative thinking atmosphere. As more and more ideas are being generated, it becomes increasingly difficult to add to those recorded responses without duplicating on previously presented ideas (See Ediger, 1978, 18).

Sixth, students do need to become proficient in the problem solving arena. Problem areas may be identified by the teacher and/or students from the ongoing reading selection. These problem areas require deliberation and

intensive thinking. Once the problem has been clearly defined, information from a variety of reference sources may be used to secure needed information. The information acquired needs to be sorted out in terms of what is salient to solve the problem and what is reliable subject matter as compared to that which does not meet these criteria. A tentative hypothesis should result which is to be evaluated with further reading and study. The hypothesis is revised and modified, if need be.

Problem solving abilities are needed in almost all situations in life and are important skills to develop. The reading teacher needs to assess how well students are doing in each facet of problem solving. Diagnosis and remediation are important ingredients here (Ediger, 2000, 59-68).

Developing Good Attitudes Toward Reading

Selected students seemingly have quality feelings toward reading whereas others may tend to be more reluctant to read on their very own during spare time. What might a teacher do to assist students to do more reading? The following are offered as suggestions:

1. have a quiet reading corner in the classroom where students may read library books. A sign could be placed here to indicate the salience of reading library books at this place.
2. have a discussion center whereby those students who wish to discuss a reading selection may do so with peers. The discussion may zero in on a multiple copy of a library book.
3. have an enticing bulletin board display on recently purchased library books to whet learner appetites to read.
4. have times devoted to introducing new library books briefly to students. Fascinating methods need to be used to encourage reading.
5. have a reading club for students to share library books read.
6. have a reading fair whereby students select their favorite book read in developing a related project to show at the fair.
7. have a bi-weekly newsletter sharing with parents what is being done in the classroom to encourage literacy endeavors among students.
8. have an author of children's literature come to school to discuss subject matter written.
9. have children attend a Children's Literature Festival at a nearby University.
10. have parents and grandparents come to the classroom on designated days to read aloud to students.
11. dramatize story content read.
12. video-tape an ongoing discussion in reading to indicate to learners in a positive manner what has been achieved and what is left to accomplish in being able to work well in a collaborative setting.
13. have students fill out a self evaluation form on what is liked as well as what is not liked in the literature curriculum.
14. have students in dyads change off reading a given selection orally to each other in a certain area of the classroom.
15. invite the school principal into the classroom to read orally to students.
16. devote time to Sustained Silent Reading -- SSR. (Ediger, 2001, 79-83).

The reading teacher may evaluate each student's attitudes based on observations made during conferences using a five point Likert scale when responding to the following criteria: The student is

1. reading an increased number of library books as indicated in conference settings.
2. improving in comprehension as indicated by comparisons made of notes made of previous to later conducted conferences.
3. making progress in using higher levels of cognition.
4. shows an inward desire to consume more literature appropriate for his/her present achievement level.
5. appraises the self when reflecting upon what has been read (Ediger, 1986-1987, 43-49).

Portfolios also should help students develop an increased interest in the world of literacy. Why? Students individually need to be actively involved in developing his/her portfolio. They own the portfolio and their personal efforts are used, with teacher guidance, to develop the final product in ongoing self evaluation. What might a student then place into a portfolio to communicate achievement?

1. cassette recordings in comparing earlier with later oral reading activities to indicate learner progress.
2. a videotape to show student achievement in committee work involving the discussion of a reading lesson.
3. drawings to reveal compression pertaining to the setting of story.
4. snapshots of a diorama made to make known the meaning of selected concepts read in a selection.
5. diagrams developed to indicate comprehension, such as in governmental organizations when reading across the curriculum.
6. a time line to show sequential labeled events in history.
7. written work on book reports, outlines, summaries, and conclusions.
8. journal writing on daily activities in reading.
9. a personal vocabulary chart, an experience chart, teacher written test results, diary entries on school work, as well as logs summarizing the diary entries.
10. puppets made and used to breathe life into a story read.

Products and processes placed into a portfolio provide excellent opportunities for diagnosis and remediation of learner difficulties in reading. For example in number one cited above, the student with teacher guidance may diagnose and then remedy specific problems faced by the learner in reading. Then too, the portfolio may provide information on the student's overall accomplishments in reading. Optimal achievement is an over riding end objective in reading instruction! (Ediger, 2000, 136-144).

Individual differences may be provided for by using Multiple Intelligence's Theory. Students may then use an individual intelligence possessed to reveal what has been learned such as doing an art project to indicate comprehension in reading (See Gardner, 1993). As a learning style, individual versus collaborative endeavors, is another factor which needs consideration when providing for each student in the reading curriculum.

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